

**Christiansburg Planning Commission  
Minutes of August 28, 2017**

Present: Harry Collins  
Mark Curtis  
Catherine Garner  
Hil Johnson  
Jeananne Knies  
Craig Moore, Chairperson  
Ann Sandbrook  
Jennifer D. Sowers, Vice-Chairperson  
Andrew Warren, Secretary <sup>Non-Voting</sup>

Absent: Matt Beasley

Staff/Visitors: Jared Crews, staff  
Christy Straight, New River Valley Regional Commission  
J. Stuart Arbuckle, Pizza Inn, 190 North Franklin Street  
Stacy Martin, Adventure Hobbies and Toys, 1645 North Franklin Street

Chairperson Moore called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Christiansburg Town Hall at 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia.

Public Comment

Chairperson Moore opened the floor for public comment. With no comments, Chairperson Moore closed the floor for public comment.

Approval of Planning Commission Minutes for August 14, 2017 Meeting

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Vice-Chairperson Sowers made a motion to approve the August 14, 2017 Planning Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Sandbrook seconded the motion, which passed 8-0.

Public Hearing for a Conditional Use Permit request by J. Stuart and Jill Arbuckle for an electronic messaging sign in the B-2 Central Business District for the Pizza Inn restaurant located at 190 North Franklin Street (tax parcel 526-(A)-259).

Chairperson Moore introduced the public hearing. J. Stuart Arbuckle stated Pizza Inn wants to replace the restaurant's current sign with an electronic reader board to eliminate the need to physically change the sign's message. Mr. Arbuckle stated the sign could be used to inform the public of downtown events in addition to stating the restaurant's specials.

Public Hearing for a Conditional Use Permit request by J. Stuart and Jill Arbuckle for an electronic messaging sign in the B-2 Central Business District for the Pizza Inn restaurant located at 190 North Franklin Street (tax parcel 526-(A)-259) – (continued).

Mr. Arbuckle stated the electronic reader board would comply with the Town's sign ordinance and avoid any flashing or distracting messaging. Mr. Arbuckle stated the reader board would increase sales at Pizza Inn, thereby increasing sales tax for the Town.

Stacy Martin, Adventure Hobbies and Toys, stated it was important for business owners in the downtown area to have the opportunity to use appropriate signage. Mr. Martin stated that out of \$29 million of Christiansburg revenue, over \$15 million comes from taxation of businesses and suggested the Town work cooperatively with its businesses.

With no further comment, Chairperson Moore closed the public hearing.

Discussion/Action for a Conditional Use Permit request by J. Stuart and Jill Arbuckle for an electronic messaging sign in the B-2 Central Business District for the Pizza Inn restaurant located at 190 North Franklin Street (tax parcel 526-(A)-259).

Chairperson Moore introduced the discussion. Commissioner Knies asked about the proposed size of the new sign. Mr. Arbuckle said the reader board would meet the current ordinance. Mr. Warren confirmed the size allowed is 18 square feet and this is not planned to change with the proposed draft currently being considered by Town Council.

Chairperson Moore asked if the code requirement that the message remain static for four seconds would be adequate. Mr. Arbuckle stated a four second interval was ideal based on the traffic flow at the intersection of North Franklin Street and Depot Street.

Commissioner Garner asked if Pizza Inn is located in the Downtown Historic District. Mr. Warren explained Pizza Inn is not in the Downtown Historic District but is within the B-2 Central Business District.

Mr. Warren stated there were no known conditional use permits for the use in question and staff had suggested no conditions beyond those regulated by ordinance. Chairperson Moore stated a condition for a longer time between messages might be useful. Commissioner Garner suggested the speed at which motorists pass may be a significant factor in the ability to read messages on electronic reader boards.

Mr. Arbuckle noted the Pizza Inn site is kept clean and avoids visual clutter and not all signs in Town are kept in good condition. Chairperson Moore stated the Town was currently trying to improve visual clutter and nonconforming signs through a new proposed ordinance.

Discussion/Action for a Conditional Use Permit request by J. Stuart and Jill Arbuckle for an electronic messaging sign in the B-2 Central Business District for the Pizza Inn restaurant located at 190 North Franklin Street (tax parcel 526-(A)-259) – (continued).

Commissioner Sandbrook stated she saw no issue with an electronic reader board and Pizza Inn's location at a stoplight leading into downtown could be seen as a transition into the Historic District. Commissioner Garner noted Pizza Inn's location would make four second intervals between messages on the reader board acceptable.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to recommend Town Council approve the conditional use permit. Commissioner Knies seconded the motion, which passed passed 8-0.

Mr. Warren stated Town Council would hold a public hearing for the conditional use permit on September 26, 2017.

With no further comment, Chairperson Moore closed the discussion.

Christiansburg Broadband Consumer Survey Results-Presentation by Christy Straight, New River Valley Regional Commission.

Christy Straight, New River Valley Regional Commission, stated the survey was designed to understand the broadband needs of Christiansburg, Blacksburg, and Montgomery County. The survey was active from October 21 to December 30, 2016 and 852 responses came from Christiansburg. Ms. Straight explained 89 percent of respondents were residents while 2 percent were businesses. Ms. Straight stated 98 percent of respondents felt internet was somewhat or very important, adding 48 percent of those respondents have children under 18 and 59 percent use internet for school and job training.

Ms. Straight stated current uses of the internet include e-mail, shopping, news, accounting, and social media while emerging uses include video conferencing, website hosting, VPN connections and online collaboration sales. Ms. Straight noted a majority of respondents currently have 6 to 9 internet-accessible devices and pay between \$30 and \$99 a month for access, with most paying between \$50 and \$69 range. Ms. Straight stated cable modem is the biggest means of access in Christiansburg and a majority of service is provided by Shentel, followed by Verizon and All Points Broadband.

Christiansburg Broadband Consumer Survey Results-Presentation by Christy Straight,  
New River Regional Commission – (continued).

Ms. Straight stated most respondents were satisfied with internet service, support, and reliability and the common reasons for dissatisfaction included slow speed, high prices, and reliability issues. Ms. Straight noted most Christiansburg users have access to 5 to 25 megabit internet and the top three reasons respondents stated for not accessing faster internet is cost, availability, and reliability.

Ms. Straight explained most business respondents were home-based, employing between 1 and 4 people. Ms. Straight stated 66 percent of these home-based businesses are not utilizing Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). Ms. Straight stated 312 respondents expressed the belief that government should encourage more competition and choice for internet providers while a few others called for public/private partnerships or for the government to act as competition itself.

Ms. Straight stated the goals of the New River Valley Regional Commission include improving broadband coverage and expanding service to underserved and unserved areas and developing public/private partnerships. Ms. Straight noted providers have been responsive to conversations about partnerships and localities could consider engaging providers, creating informational websites, expediting permitting, review, and inspections, and developing make-ready policies in order to foster better broadband.

Mr. Warren stated there was a role for Planning Commission and the Town to play in the process of gaining better broadband and suggested looking at the Comprehensive Plan which currently does not mention broadband. Mr. Warren stated the plan update would likely begin in 2018 and there is an opportunity to look into the technology section of the Plan before the update.

Commissioner Johnson asked why competition in the area was presently limited and Ms. Straight stated infrastructure limitations could possibly be discouraging competition. Ms. Straight noted Shentel currently leases out infrastructure to smaller providers but not to competitors. Ms. Straight explained middle mile broadband programming provided a potential means of building broadband from I-81 to different locations within the Town but expense and competition with major providers served as a deterrent.

Mr. Warren stated several property and business owners in Cambria are in need of broadband connection. Mr. Warren stated the dilemma recently described to him by a potential broadband provider to this area that existing providers could easily lower prices to be more affordable if the new provider were willing to invest in infrastructure.

Christiansburg Broadband Consumer Survey Results-Presentation by Christy Straight, New River Regional Commission – (continued).

Commissioner Knies asked if Shentel and Comcast served the same areas of Montgomery County because she is not aware of any crossover in Blacksburg or Christiansburg. Commissioner Knies stated if there was crossover of providers, competition may lead to better prices and service.

Mr. Martin stated he is paying widely varying prices for differing levels of service within in Blacksburg and Christiansburg. Commissioner Knies noted the internet speed in Blacksburg is generally much faster than in Christiansburg. Mr. Martin stated internet speed is an important factor for business owners and residents wanting to relocate.

With no further comment, Chairperson Moore closed the discussion.

Other business.

Chairperson Moore opened the discussion.

Chairperson Moore stated membership needed to be determined for the Development Subcommittee and the Comprehensive Plan Subcommittee and the Commissioners could let Mr. Warren and himself know if they were interested in serving on either. Mr. Warren noted meetings would be held at 6:00 p.m. before Planning Commission meetings and the two committees would not meet the same night. Mr. Warren stated there are currently no members of the Comprehensive Plan subcommittee.

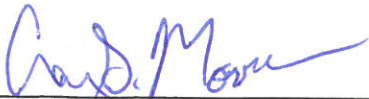
Commissioner Collins emphasized how useful the Regional Commission could be to the Town in the future. Ms. Straight stated the regional Commission works in transportation, local assistance, zoning ordinance, comprehensive planning, and grant opportunities.

Mr. Warren stated Town Council approved the conditional use permit for New River Barbell and Fitness and noted the proposed rezoning of the Cox Family Farms property and draft sign ordinance were still under consideration.

Commissioner Johnson applauded the success of the Touch-a-Truck event at the New River Mall over the weekend.

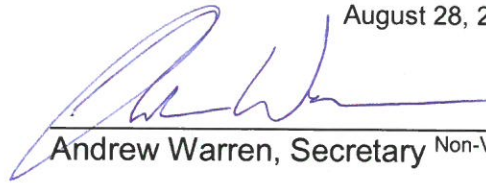
Mr. Warren stated there is an open position on the Board of Zoning Appeals and explained it would be ideal to have enough applications to appoint alternates.

With no further business, Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 8:06 p.m.



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Craig Moore, Chairperson



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Andrew Warren, Secretary Non-Voting